

OES Hub Newsletter

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Greetings from OES Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Anne Hall

Hi! I'm Anne Hall, the new Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in OES. I recently visited two of our regional environmental Hubs – Kathmandu and Bangkok - and was introduced to the tremendous work they do. It was inspiring to learn of U.S. support for Nepalese efforts to reduce earthquake risks and employ genetic techniques to help conserve endangered wildlife; hear first-hand the strong regional commitment to combatting wildlife trafficking through enforcement networks (see page 3); and see the vibrant collaboration across both regions on a broad range of health, environment, science and technology issues. I was privileged to help launch an exciting regional water health project that empowers high school students to educate themselves, their communities and their governments on water quality challenges. (I'm talking to high schoolers above).



Photo credit: Sudhir Mahat, U.S. Embassy Kathmandu Public Affairs Section

Although new to OES and the ESTH portfolio, I am an ardent supporter of the mission and the people who work every day to advance regional environmental cooperation. The regional environmental hubs are an essential part of our team - check out their latest work in this edition of the Newsletter.

South Asia Hub



Students from a local high school analyze a water sample
Photo credit: Sudhir Mahat, U.S. Embassy Kathmandu Public Affairs Section

South Asia is home to many of the world's greatest rivers. The vast majority wind throughout the region from their headwaters in the "water towers" of the Himalayan-Hindu Kush mountain range. South Asia is also one of the world's most water-stressed regions, with as little as 22% of wastewater treated.

In November, the South Asia hub team in Nepal launched a regional water health project with the help of students at a local public high school, and in cooperation with the Public Affairs Section of Embassy Kathmandu and the former Nepali Minister of Water Dipak Gyawali.

The project enables students as "citizen scientists" to measure water health and upload data online from a user-friendly app on their smart phones, allowing for water health comparisons both within and between countries. A non-governmental organization also works with the students in each country to better understand the impact of regional water quality and how it affects transboundary issues. The project helps raise awareness of water and water quality issues. It is organized by the Hub and Public Affairs sections in Embassy Kathmandu and with U.S. Embassy Colombo, Sri Lanka and U.S. Consulates Hyderabad and Mumbai in India.

Central America and the Caribbean Hub



Photo credits: U.S. Embassy San Jose Public Affairs

During the 15th International Book Fair in Costa Rica in September, Embassy San Jose promoted ocean conservation, environmental awareness and wildlife protection. More than 70,000 Costa Ricans attended the 10-day fair, most of them passing through the U.S. booth. The booth's innovative design featured walls made of illuminated 9x12 foot photos of endangered sea turtles and scenes from U.S. national parks including redwood forests, undersea life, waterfalls and mountains (see photo above left). Special guest author, U.S. environmental reporter Jennie Smith, gave multiple presentations in Spanish about her book, "Stolen World," which tells the tale of illegal wildlife trafficking (see photo above right). She joined the non-governmental organization, the Sea Turtle Conservancy, in a round-table discussion about efforts to protect this endangered species in Costa Rica and the wider Central America and Caribbean region. She also participated in a webchat with two Costa Rican environmental bloggers, which was open to an international audience.

Southern Africa Hub



Zambian cotton farmers at biotechnology outreach presentation

Photo credit: Phatsimo Lobelo, Regional ESTH Specialist

The Southern Africa regional hub led an international team of biotechnology experts who provided science-based information on the economic and environmental benefits of agricultural biotechnology. The information, tailored to African agricultural and food security needs, also emphasized the climate and environmental benefits of the technology, such as reducing carbon emissions and pesticide use. Several Zambian and Botswana environmental non-governmental organizations concluded that adoption of biotechnology could further their climate change and wildlife protection goals. The diverse audience for the meeting, which was supported by the State Department, included farmers, government officials, agribusiness representatives, students, researchers, NGOs and the general public in both Zambia and Botswana.

East Asia Hub

In September the East Asia Regional Environmental Hub team visited Sulawesi, an island in Indonesia, to observe reforestation and wildlife conservation programs funded by a grant from the State Department. Farmers are reforesting with palm sugar trees that produce organic sugar. The sugar is then exported around the world as a cash crop to support the economic livelihood of the farmers and the Masarang Palm Sugar Factory. A second project works with a local wildlife conservation center (Tasikoki Wildlife Center) to help local schools identify and protect animals in their natural habitats, as well as monitor and protect the four species of sea turtles that nest on village beaches.



*Local farmers with palm sugar seedlings for reforestation
Photo credit: Tahra Vose, Regional Environmental Officer*

Combatting Wildlife Trafficking

OES Regional Environmental Hubs continue to work toward stemming illegal trade in wildlife, supporting the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking issued by President Obama in February 2014. See what two of our hubs are doing to combat illegal wildlife trafficking.

Southern Africa: The Regional Environment Office at U.S. Embassy Gaborone, Botswana, brought together wildlife officials from seven southern African nations and agreed on the structure and goals of the Wildlife Enforcement Network for Southern Africa (WENSA), a regional network to coordinate the fight against wildlife trafficking. Representatives from the Association of South East Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN WEN), the oldest and largest such network, also participated and were key to the meeting's success. Their lessons learned will inform Southern African officials as they establish the WENSA.

South America: In September 65 environmental prosecutors and wildlife enforcement officials from eight South American countries met to lay the foundation for a South American wildlife enforcement network (WEN). Participants shared their experiences investigating and prosecuting wildlife crimes and emphasized the need to strengthen international and domestic information sharing. Prosecutors signed a declaration to create a South American WEN and agreed to an action plan to maintain momentum. The group agreed to meet again in May 2015 to advance the WEN's creation. The U.S. Consulate in Sao Paulo, Brazil and the Brazilian non-governmental organization Freeland Brasil organized and led the meeting supported by the South America hub.

The Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, often referred to as "Oceans, Environment and Science" or "OES," was created in 1974 by Congress. OES works to advance U.S. foreign policy goals in such critical areas as climate change, wildlife trafficking, water, polar issues, oceans policy, infectious diseases, science and technology, and space policy, to name a few.

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